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President's Notes: Challenge!

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CHALLENGE !

"History is a cruel stepmother, and when it retaliates, it stops at nothing," Lenin's poignant observation is no less relevant today than when it was made 50 years ago.

The current national apathy toward the military, toward overseas involvement and U.S. world responsibility is strikingly similar to that which so long delayed a recognition by the American people of the growing Japanese and German threat back in the 1930's. Then it took the attack on Pearl Harbor to shock the Nation and galvanize American public opinion. Three decades later, despite an ominous Soviet military challenge, a similar isolationist sentiment is very much in vogue. But today, we cannot afford another Pearl Harbor. Not in this nuclear age!

In his book *Democracy in America*, the young French scholar Alexis de Tocqueville noted well over a century ago that we Americans are slow to react to foreign threat until danger is imminent. Walt Rostow emphasized this point in his now famous lecture on the "Domestic Determinants of Foreign Policy," given at the Global Strategy Discussions here last June. And as Dr. Lloyd Free observes in his article appearing in this same issue of the *Naval War College Review*, "... through the years... it is usually events rather than persuasion or propaganda which trigger major changes in popular attitudes." Indeed, a reading of our own history in the 20th century would seem to validate all of these observations.

We delayed our entry into World War I well after our European friends were deeply involved in a battle for their very survival. We even elected a President in 1916 who campaigned on the slogan, "He kept us out of war." Over two



decades later, President Roosevelt's deep concern over the plight of Britain and France, and other European nations scourged by Hitler's blitzkrieg was not reflected in the majority of American public opinion. Similarly, there was little concern for Japan's aggressive moves in China and Southeast Asia. As a Nation we were apathetic, even hostile, to greater preparedness, notably munitions production and effective draft legislation. Our Army was training with broomsticks—and the draft bill was passed by only one vote.

This is not to say that there were not groups of concerned citizens anxious about the national mood of detachment and the disastrous results they portended for the United States. As historian Richard W. Steele notes in an article appearing in the latest issue of *The American Historical Review*, "Preparing the Public for War: Efforts to Establish a National Propaganda, 1940-41," there were numerous citizens both in and out of Government, including members of President Roosevelt's Cabinet, actively involved in trying to establish various programs and agencies to alert the people to the impending threat. Yet progress was interminably slow. The President was fearful that his active involvement in such projects would incite the same charges of sensationalism and distortion which had been leveled earlier against

Woodrow Wilson. In fact, he did try in his speeches and in his "fireside chats" to educate the people of the country to the dangers of the international situation. However, he was inhibited from speaking out candidly in a voice of deep concern or permitting any Government organization to sound the alarm, for fear of being accused of "propagandizing." As a result, little was done to mobilize public opinion. Pearl Harbor did what the distant, ominous rumblings in Europe and Asia could not.

It has been said that we learn from history only one thing: that men never learn anything from history. Is this likely to be the case again? The current national trends calling for reduced overseas involvement, eliminating the draft, and drastically reducing military spending would suggest that it might well be. These trends could certainly stifle any active effort to coalesce the national will in the face of a growing Soviet threat.

In both major wars of this century, we were fortunate that, despite our 11th hour response, we confronted an enemy whose strength was not to prove as durable as our own. We had time to exploit our tremendous industrial potential for producing armaments in "slow" conventional wars. But today, with the balance of power so dynamically shifting, there is the clear possibility that within 3 to 5 years the combined Soviet nuclear and conventional military capability could overwhelmingly surpass our own, that by the 11th hour our time will have already run out.

The momentum of the Soviet Union military buildup continues. That nation is now one of the world's leading seapowers... and in most definitions *the* leading one. Its submarine force is indisputably the world's greatest. Nor can we expect to counter this situation by relying on a superior strategic nuclear capability. In the past half decade, the Soviets have engaged in a major

effort to shift the balance of power in this crucial area too.

In contrast we see our own Nation passing through an antiwar, antimilitary, antipreparedness mood. Many prominent representatives of the congressional, business, and intellectual communities today are vociferously arguing against defense spending and military related research and development. Among some of these leaders of tomorrow there is a "laissez-faire" attitude which is drifting across the Nation—and picking up advocates with lightning speed. Some would even argue for unilateral disarmament. In short, much of the Nation seems unconcerned that we are falling behind the Soviets and rendering ourselves vulnerable to either military defeat or, as I believe, more likely, blackmail tactics. The question is: Are we setting ourselves up for the retaliation of Lenin's "cruel stepmother"?

There is one bright spot. In our democracy, even minorities can be heard. Fortunately, there are many citizens in all walks of life today deeply concerned and distressed over the effect of the Vietnam syndrome and certain domestic trends in motion which could lead to disastrous consequences for U.S. national security. Members of the Naval Reserve and the other Armed Forces Reserve components, the Navy League, and comparable civilian organizations lending support to the Army, Air Force, and Marine Corps are and must continue to be kept fully informed as to the dangers that are building. The resources, abilities, and interest of these individuals must be recognized... and called on. While the Regular military are limited in their credibility in speaking out about the threat—often being charged with military parochialism—Reserve officers and men and well-informed civilian supporters of the Armed Forces will be listened to. They, rather than the active military, should carry the torch. Through them and our

civilian Government leaders such as the Secretary of Defense and Secretaries of the services, the American people must be warned of the dangers ahead to their security.

Hopefully, these people in positions of responsibility will be quick to speak out at club and civic luncheons, dinners, and other gatherings. Radio, TV, and newspaper interviews with civilian Government national security experts, backed up by Regular military officer experts, could have the most important national impact of all.

I am confident that the American people will respond once they understand the gravity of the situation in which we find ourselves today. The documented case is clear, and, even within intelligence security constraints, the story that can be told is convincing and ominous. It must be told objectively and be absolutely factual. It must not be exaggerated or rely on emotion or estimates of "enemy intentions." Before the people can respond, they

must be told the hard, true facts: the current shift in the balance of raw military power and what it portends, both for themselves and their children and their children.

When he was CNO, Adm. Arleigh Burke said, "It is not enough to . . . have the right ideas. You must communicate those ideas to other people and convince them that you are right."

If we don't start passing the word today, we'll be guilty of failing to learn from history and risking a nuclear Pearl Harbor. As Nietzsche once wrote, "The final lesson of history is: 'Let's never go back there again!'"



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